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A "Natural" history of land in cold war Guatemala, 1951-1985

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A “Natural” History of Land in Cold War Guatemala 1951-1985

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MASTER'S THESIS

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A “Natural” History of Land in Cold War Guatemala 1951-1985

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

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Of the Requirements for the Degree
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Abstract

The Cold War in Latin America has been widely studied, as has the impact of the proliferation of Multi-National Corporations which specialized in export agriculture such as coffee and bananas. In Guatemala, much has been written about the 1954 coup supported by the United States, and its basis in the U.S. government and corporate aversion to a 1952 land reform bill known as Decree 900. The coup reversed Decree 900, but the political vestiges of land reform, through peasant organization and empowerment remained, and ultimately this led to changes in the relationships that social actors had with Guatemalan land. Examining primary documents including governmental reports from the Guatemalan government, U.S. government and U.S. governmental agencies along with two memoirs of indigenous peoples, this thesis shows a deeper, more complete view of complex and nuanced power relationships than traditional binary models have shown in the past.

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Introduction

Guatemala is perhaps most infamously known for its violent civil war in the 1980s, and accusations that the Guatemalan military committed genocide against the indigenous Maya population. In 1953, Víctor Manuel Gutiérrez, head of the federation of labor unions in Guatemala said, "One can live without tribunals, but one can't live without land."[1] This statement was made before the worst of the violence, but his words encapsulate the heart of the bloody conflict. In this simple statement, Gutiérrez ties justice and land together, privileging the material and the tangible (land) over the intangible (justice), but nonetheless identifying the root causes of the decades-long conflict within Guatemala as a struggle over land and power. Especially since the controversial land reform bill of 1952, justice and land *do* go hand-in-hand in Guatemala. However, this link- between land and politics- is often overlooked in the exigency of the violence of the Cold War in Guatemala.

This thesis steps into an existing body of literature that discusses hegemony and development, indigenous peoples and movements, and the Cold War. I argue that it is important to tell the "natural" history of Guatemala in the Cold War, and explain how the integration of environmental history provides a more complete view of the Guatemalan Cold War experience. By historicizing the role of land in the Cold War in Guatemala, we can see how the land acted as both real and symbolic capital, lent legitimacy to competing social groups in turn and legitimized competing visions of Guatemalan progress. The changing political values of Guatemalan land as a result of indigenous and resistance movements demonstrate a more nuanced view of power-resistance relationships within Guatemala during

[1] Quoted in Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 24.

the Cold War, which often exists outside of the simplistic democracy versus communism dichotomy.

The Cold War is too often understood in terms of binaries. While historians have moved beyond the USA vs. USSR dichotomy, the inclusion of more actors such as China, Cuba and the rest of the so-called "Third World," simply results in an expansion of the idea that the Cold War was waged between the powerful and weak, or the communists and the capitalists, or the superpowers and the "others." Authors such as Odd Arne Westad have broadened the Cold War discussion to include the very hot conflicts across the globe as critical components of superpower actions and reactions, and examine the material impact of the Cold War in these other places.[2] These large histories of the Cold War reinforce the ideas that there were powerful actors in the Cold War and weak actors. At the same time, authors such as Piero Gleijeses who examine the interplay between superpowers and the "third world," still replicate the binaries between powerful and weak, along with hegemony and resistance. Gleijeses introduces nuance to the Cold War paradigm by showing that Cuba, while traditionally thought of on the "weak" end of the spectrum, actually often acted in a role somewhere in between the superpowers and African political actors.[3] Instead of the traditional dichotomies that historians have constructed around the Cold War in Guatemala, this thesis shows a more nuanced view of Guatemalan power relations.

Rather than two categories of power and resistance, this study examines four total categories of power within Guatemala from 1951-1992, to show layers of power relations that emerge when focusing on the role that Guatemalan land played. President Jacobo Árbenz

[2] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War; Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[3] Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

was elected in 1951, and overthrown in 1954- thus beginning the intensity of the Cold War in Guatemala. In 1992, Rigoberta Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, with the Guatemalan Truth Commission following in 1994. This periodization thus allows us to focus on the Cold War "proper" in Guatemala. In this period, land functioned as real and symbolic capital, and was used in various political projects as a means to achieve certain political and economic ends, as will be discussed below. In order to break away from describing a dichotomy in Guatemala, this thesis has constructed four social categories to use as analytical tools. These four categories are: (1) the powerful "ruthless modernizers," or those who comprise the traditional powerful social groups and pursue economic development and capitalist exploitation, (2) the "development pushers," or those social groups who are partly in the elite social groups, but pursue different goals, such as liberation theologists and members of NGOs, (3) the "Activist Maya" or those social groups traditionally thought of as actively resisting modernizing rule- such as members of the Maya movement and guerilla groups, and (4) Middling Maya, or those poor Maya and Ladinos who co-produced capitalist hegemony by growing non-traditional crops, for example.

This thesis argues that social actors reacted in a myriad of ways to the Cold War in Guatemala, and these categories are meant to show this in two ways. First, using four categories immediately complicates the traditional binary model. Second, these four categories, even in this thesis, are extremely fluid and flexible. They have an uneasy coexistence, at times overlapping, at times defining themselves in opposition to another. These are not essential and distinct constructions, but are designed to help understand complexities, and are therefore complex and somewhat nebulous themselves.

Historiography

The traditional narrative of Guatemala acknowledges the importance of land during the post-colonial period as German and American planters were drawn to the Pacific Guatemalan coast to set up coffee and fruit plantations. These efforts were characterized by a dominant discourse of development as elites extolled the values of utilizing land resources for capitalistic exploitation in order to export cash crops to Europe and the United States.[4] In this phase of history and historiography, there is a clear focus on the role of land in Guatemalan history, as is true in most histories of resource exploitation.

The democratic experience of the Ten Years of Spring in Guatemala and the U.S.-backed coup which ended it, show a new phase of power relations based on land. The Ten Years of Spring refers to the decade of 1944-1954 in Guatemala, beginning when Juan Jose Arévalo was elected president, and ending with the CIA sponsored coup removing President Jacobo Árbenz Guzman. The 1944 election was characterized as a "democratic revolution," and both presidents instituted broad social reforms. The most controversial of these reforms was known as Decree 900, essentially a land reform bill redistributing fallow lands to peasants from large landholders with the threat of complete expropriation if landowners failed to comply. This legislation threatened the largest landholder in Guatemala, the U.S. -based United Fruit Company (UFCO), whose directors complained to US government officials that Árbenz's close association with Communists was the impetus for this law that

[4] Carol Smith, *Guatemalan Indians and the State, 1540-1988,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Roseberry, William et al., *Coffee, Society, and Power in Latin America*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Grandin, Greg. *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

reeked of communism, and if something was not done to arrest the progress of communism in Guatemala, soon the red menace itself would be at Mexico (and the US)'s doorstep.

Previous examinations of the Guatemalan experience at this time have reinforced the idea of binary experiences in Guatemala- powerful and wealthy Guatemalans experienced the Ten Years of Spring and the Cold War in one way, while poor Guatemalans experienced these same events in different ways with different reactions. [5] For the wealthy and powerful Guatemalans, according to these studies, the Ten Years of Spring were terrifying and unstable, characterized by the constant fear of losing their land and uprisings from those who worked the land. In this case, the Ten Years of Spring were a radicalizing event which encouraged the violent repression of these same groups which they feared during the Arévalo and Árbenz years. With the assistance of the United States, these social groups (including the Guatemalan military and landowners), reacted with violence and repression as they continued to feel threats from guerilla groups and others who refused to participate in their exploitative capitalism.

Poor groups, primarily poor Mayas, but also sometimes including poor Ladinos,[6] on the other hand, were empowered by the Ten Years of Spring.[7] Not only did they experience greater electoral power, but also the very policies which so terrified the wealthy Guatemalans gave political power and legitimacy to poor Guatemalans. Land was not summarily redistributed, as the wealthy Guatemalans portrayed it. Instead poor agricultural workers

[5] See Greg Grandin, *Last Colonial Massacre*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); William Roseberry et al., *Coffee Power and Society*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1995); Smith, Carol, *Guatemalan Indians and the State*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

[6] Not-wealthy Ladinos have yet to be studied in great detail

[7] Carol Smith, *Guatemalan Indians and the State, 1540-1988,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Kay Warren, *The symbolism of subordination: Indian identity in a Guatemalan Town*. (Austin: University of Texas Press. 1978).

were obliged to participate in a legal process in order to gain legal ownership of their "own" land through Decree 900. This reinforced the idea of newfound political power for poor Guatemalans in two ways. First, the workers experienced a political process that was truly participatory, and was working for them, rather than summarily against them as they were accustomed to. Second, and possibly more important, Decree 900 set up cooperative political efforts among poor Guatemalans, forcing them to work together in these newly legitimized political efforts.

While the threat to capitalist landholdings posed by Decree 900 was the justification for U.S. intervention in Guatemalan politics, the continued threat of perceived communist guerilla groups in the countryside refusing to adhere to the exploitative capitalist practices of mono- and cash-cropping were justification for continued U.S. military and development aid to the Guatemalan Government throughout the second half of the twentieth century.[8] Therefore, land, the legitimate method of cultivation, and the right to custodianship of Guatemalan land and resources have been at the heart of many Guatemalan historical problems, but historians have consistently naturalized the role of land in Guatemala, and chosen to focus instead on traditional political power relationships and dichotomies between Indians and Ladinos, or power/resistance- without examining the roots of these differences, or how these different identities have been claimed and performed over the last sixty years.

This traditional vision of Cold War politics focuses on Cold War dichotomies- Communism/Capitalism, power/resistance, elite/non-elite, Indian/ladino,

[8] Mein to Oliver. Letter. February 27, 1968, FRUS Volume XXXI, Document 100. http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d100 In this letter, Guatemalan ambassador Mein identifies differences between urban communist insurgent groups and rural guerilla groups, both in group goals and aims, as well as appropriate U.S. responses.

domestic/international.[9] However, focusing on Cold War politics tends to dissociate these dichotomies from the integral component of Guatemalan land by naturalizing the role that the environment played in Cold War power struggles. I examine the relationship that social actors and social groups in Guatemala had with not only the changing politics of the Cold War in Guatemala, but also changing relationships with Guatemalan land. Therefore, I argue that there are more nuances and complexities within the power relationships in Guatemala than have been traditionally conceived.

The traditionally constructed binaries have effectively created discursive dichotomies, which force social actors to claim one of two identities within the binary, often defining themselves in opposition to "the other" identity.[10] In reality, however, Guatemalan social actors from 1951-1985 experienced many more than two social and political identities, as this thesis will discuss. Examining the political values of land in Guatemala will show that there were more complex social and political relationships than a binary model would suggest. Land, in this sense, becomes an analytical tool for understanding traditional politics which serves as a common thread among the four social groups. While land reform through Decree 900 is a centerpiece of historical discussions about political change in Guatemala, these discussions have centered on political changes, and how Decree 900 itself changed political processes through the creation of bureaucracy at the local level. The contribution of this thesis is to extend this discussion to examine how relationships with the land itself were changed by these political changes.

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[9] See for example, Schlesinger, Stephen and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982); Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan revolution and the United States, 1944-1954.* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991).

[10] William Roseberry et al provide a good discussion of struggles of Maya agricultural societies transitioning to a society in which capitalism becomes the hegemonic ideology and Kinzer and Schlesinger provide a discussion of the impact of the conflict between communism and capitalism in Guatemala.

When considering the Cold War in Guatemala, it is apparent that there were many different kinds of policies that were pursued, with many different consequences in the Guatemalan social, political, and natural environments. The coup itself was justified by national security interests within the context of the communist threat during the Cold War, but was also largely spurred by corporate and economic interests. While these security and economic interests may have been the driving force behind the U.S. role in these countries, development and modernization policies were also employed, with their corresponding ideologies and goals by modernization theorists and proponents of development. With the confluence of these many policies, it is important to keep in mind, as Donald Worster encourages, "ways in which the biophysical world has influenced the course of human history and the ways in which people have thought about and tried to transform their surroundings."[11] These goals and policies were implemented within the context of an existing natural environment and social actors who had existing ideas and notions about their surrounding natural environments. The environment itself was manipulated through development programs, as social actors' notions about the natural environment were also changed.

The U.S. intervention in Guatemala began out of concern for the utilization of natural resources within the country.[12] From there, the U.S. continued to participate in and support modernization and development programs which had tangible impacts on the natural environment and those people who rely on it for food, housing, or livelihood. For this reason it is imperative to incorporate a study of the environment into our understanding of the role

[11] Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993), 20.

[12] While the ultimate causes of the coup have been debated, authors agree that, initially, UFC's concern over the land reform bill played a large (if not necessarily ultimately decisive) role in the decision to intervene.

of the United States in these countries. Donald Worster has argued that "Our history can never be truly complete unless we realize how much of it really centered on a process of interaction with the forces of nature."[13] In studying foreign policy, this connection and interactive process with nature is often overlooked. Foreign policy studies tend to focus on those elements of society and policies that can be concretely controlled, measured, and are directly legislated. While these foreign policies often have long ranging environmental effects, these effects are understudied. Environmental history, on the whole, aims to "put nature back into history,"[14] and this is especially important when examining the consequences of modernization and development policies.

Environmental History as a component of Guatemalan Development Discourse

Examining foreign policy power relations within the context of environmental history can provide a deeper, more complete view of the flow of power and resistance to exercises of power from elite groups. Joachim Radkau has claimed "Environmental history is always also the history of political power- and the more it moves away from practical problems on the ground and into the sphere of high-level politics, the more that is the case."[15] In the case of Guatemala, power can be seen in the way that the natural environment was manipulated- both physically and discursively.

[13] Worster, *Wealth of Nature,* 18.
[14] Worster, *Wealth of Nature,* 20.
[15] Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9.

Foreign policy decisions, including the supporting role of multi-national corporations (MNCs), rely integrally on the cooperation of the natural environment, so it is important to historicize the changing role of nature within the context of larger modernization and development policies. MNCs, such as United Fruit Company in Guatemala, needed fertile Guatemalan soil, adequate rainfall and sunshine along with a willing local labor force in order to turn a profit on Guatemalan bananas. Furthermore, UFC needed to keep diseases and blights away from its crops as well.[16] Because foreign policy decisions were so heavily influenced by UFC, this reliance on natural conditions is relevant to discussions of U.S. foreign policy.[17] Later, this thesis will show how the types of crops grown by the poor population in Guatemala (erstwhile subsistence farmers) became an agenda for U.S. foreign policy in an attempt to promote a "stable," middle-class and non-Marxist peasantry through non traditional export crops. However, often in historical accounts nature is overlooked, or mentioned only in passing. For example, a major drought in 1954 is mentioned but not fully explored in the official CIA account discussing the efficacy of Árbenz's replacement, Castillo Armás. While the report states that the corn crop was "devastated," the full implications of this devastation are not explored.[18] This shows that the role of environment and land has been naturalized in histories and accounts of Guatemalan politics, as environment is consistently overlooked in favor of political explanations for struggles.

After overthrowing Árbenz and ensuring that the new government was pro-U.S., U.S. involvement was not over. Development projects were just beginning, thanks to a burgeoning

[16] John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, & Environmental Change in Honduras & the United States*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), Chapter 4, "Sigatoka, Science, and Control," 104-127.
[17] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, xiv. This book discusses how the Soviet threat to the United States was less important in the decision making than the threat of Guatemalan sovereignty to U.S. Security and discusses the connection to UFC.
[18] Cullather, *Secret History,* 113-114.

focus on Modernization in the third world. Modernization theorist Michael Latham has identified Modernization "As an ideology, … A larger, liberal internationalist understanding of the very nature of American society and the sweeping, global transformations that a projection of American power could bring about."[19] In this way, modernization was more than just a way of looking at the world or an idea in the ivory tower; it was a justification for intervention of U.S. government and corporate interests in the affairs of other, "developing" countries. Modernization offered a justification, based on American technological, ideological, and moral superiority, for intervention and large scale infrastructural developmental projects. In Guatemala this project came in the guise of the Latin American Alliance for Progress, the Green Revolution, and military support for rooting out communism.

Modernization was a way of showing American superiority and a way of molding the developing world to proceed from "traditional" to "modern" in a manner that was friendly to the anti-Communist agenda of the Americans. Latham identifies that this was a "conceptual framework that articulated a common collection of assumptions about the nature of American society and its ability to transform a world perceived as both culturally and materially deficient."[20] The development of Guatemala toward modernization and "progress"[21] were tied to the economic developments in the country, and those economic developments were tied to political leaders and technology. As democracy was not perceived as a viable option

[19] Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 8.
[20] Latham, *Modernization,* 5.
[21] For a further discussion of the importance of "progress" in the U.S., and the projection of this importance outside of North America, see Jessica B Teisch, *Engineering Nature: Water, development and the global spread of American environmental expertise,* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2011).

for Guatemala,[22] U.S. involvement would have to perpetuate the teleological progression toward modernization through other means. In particular, this was done through an infusion of cash, and development projects centering on agricultural practices. Contact with the United States through corporations and the deployment of new technology to smallholders from development organizations was seen as the way to continued modernization. MNCs needed political leaders in Guatemala who would be friendly to their needs, and who would not return to the "backward" notions of land reform. This thesis joins this argument, but extends it to other social groups and beyond the idea that there were those who were "modernizers" and those who were the object of modernizing policies.

As the Cold War began, for the United States Government (USG) and the Government of Guatemala (GOG), the threat of communists taking over Central America (placing a Communist country "between Mexico and the Panama canal," as Ronald Reagan once termed it), was an unacceptable outcome. The military dictators of Guatemala were unwilling to lose the fight on communists, or their own power. What resulted was a period of extreme repression towards the poor, who had the most to gain from a Communist system redistributing wealth. One of the ways that the GOG and USG attempted to arrest the development of Communism within Guatemala was through imposing control in any way they could. The broad category of "development" was one of the primary means through which this control was implemented.

Through all of these development projects, the natural environment played a key role in the way policies were implemented, and the way citizens adapted these policies based on their own experiences and personal needs. In these adaptations, it is clear that

[22] Cullather, *Secret History* 62.

"Environmental history is invariably shaped also by the formation of ever larger political and even more expansive economic entities, and by the growing interconnectedness of the world."[23] The interaction between these modernization policies, the environment and how all of these changes affected social groups in Guatemala is a process that needs to be historicized. In *Banana Wars*, Striffler and Moberg argue that "The cultivation of bananas was intimately linked to processes of nation-building, capital formation, and internal and international migration."[24] While this clearly links an agricultural product to political projects, it fails to link back to the impact of these political projects on Guatemalan landscape. Some of the essays look at the way social actors' relationships with *each other* changed, but fail to consider the resulting impact on the Guatemalan environment. This thesis argues that the entire process is important to consider- and that doing so provides a more complete view of the Cold War experience in Guatemala.

Studies of Hegemony and Resistance

Rural populations in Guatemala had relationships with the natural environments surrounding them for quite some time before development and modernization programs were implemented following the coups. Traditional actors include farmers- both landed and non-landed, inside small rural villages, and some nomadic populations. In these communities, social groups were aware of local environmental conditions, and the capabilities of the land.

[23] Radkau, *Nature and Power,* 10.
[24] Mark Moberg and Steve Striffler, eds., *Banana Wars: Power, Production & History in the Americas*, (Duke University Press, Durham: 2003), 3.

After the coup, and in the midst of the Cold War, modernization and development projects were implemented in Guatemala as direct and indirect forms of the projection of American power. At the same time, "resistance" to these policies took many forms- from active resistance from guerilla farmers, to ideological resistance through reclaiming indigenous identities, to mild co-production and adaptation of development and capitalism through export agriculture.

For many Guatemalans, and indeed many denizens of the fertile so-called "Third World" during the Cold War, transitioning to capitalism meant moving from subsistence agriculture to export agriculture. This was particularly true in Guatemala. This transition was particularly visible in Guatemala as the export crops were non-traditional, and therefore were crops that indigenous people were unaccustomed to cultivating.[25] This is true in large and small scale agriculture. For large agriculture, owned by foreign investors, coffee and bananas were cultivated, and then shipped to foreign consumers. Indigenous populations had to travel to provide labor for these plantations. The development programs beginning in the 1960s encouraged small-scale export agriculture, necessitating private property, and encouraging the cultivation of broccoli, snow peas and wheat. These crops were not a part of the palate of Guatemalan people, and therefore if they were not sold, Maya people would not eat their surplus.[26]

Resistance to these hegemonic development programs took many forms. As John Gledhill has noted, it is important to understand "why people in apparently similar-

[25] Presumably this would be true for poor Ladinos as well, although there is little research into this area.
[26] Edward Fischer & Peter Benson, *Broccoli and Desire: Global Connections and Maya Struggles in Postwar Guatemala*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), page 30.

"situations of dominations"- react differently."[27] This thesis attempts to answer that question in Guatemala during the Cold War. While many social groups in Guatemala experienced repression and domination, I argue that there were many different reactions to this repression. At the same time, there was a diverse set of social groups who are traditionally thought of as being the perpetrators of this domination, but I argue that these groups too were diverse in motives and actions.

The emergence of hegemonic United States power projection following World War II has been extensively studied and theorized about by historians and political scientists. One of the ways this power has been theorized is through the spread of international science and technology. In particular, John Krige postulates "Basic science, or fundamental research, was the key node articulating American hegemony with the postwar reconstruction of science in Europe." [28] Krige, along with others postulates that the weakened European countries relied on American scientific assistance to rebuild. In this way, Krige argues that science and foreign policy were coupled in a way that reflected science's new role and "presumed significance to economic growth, industrial strength, and national security."[29] This scientific knowledge involved a spreading of American ideals and ideology through the rationality of science and technology. This offered opportunities for local social groups to choose whether to accept the scientific aid and support from the United States or not, and furthermore, social groups were able to locally adapt the message of power to suit their own purposes. Krige calls this "co-production" of hegemony, in which the relatively flexible policies of the United

[27] John Gledhill and Patience A. Schell, eds, *New Approaches to Resistance in Brazil and Mexico*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.
[28] John Krige, *American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 3.
[29] Krige, *American* Hegemony, 3.

States were "adopted and reinterpreted" to create specific local conditions which were increasingly influenced by the United States, but not pre-determined by U.S. policies. [30]

Guatemala illustrates that the emphasis on science and rational improvement and development was clear in the spreading of U.S. power in Latin America, which was of crucial geopolitical importance during the Cold War. The spread of American technology is seen also through the Green Revolution, in which the U.S. government and non-governmental organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation developed and promoted the use of new strains of disease resistant and shorter wheat, along with the increased use of pesticides and fertilizers to increase yields.

As the state elite perpetuated ideas and discourses promoting harnessing nature through technology and modernization as a form of power, local social groups retained and modified their existing notions of their own relationships with nature as a way to retain or reclaim local power and authority. This can be seen in a few ways. The state and ruling elite (the "ruthless modernizers") appropriated visions of nature by encouraging urbanization; promoting visions of the modern state in state publications: and projections of state force and violence in nature. This included using nature for mass grave sites and targeting social groups whose visions of nature differed from theirs. Rural indigenous populations, who did not conform to the vision of nature which was economically productive in the way of large scale or export agriculture, were accused of colluding with communist guerillas. The way of dealing with these subversive rural denizens was violent repression in the form of maintenance of "model villages" which promoted and taught the "proper" method of cultivation for profit and private land ownership. Alternatively, communities which were not

[30] Krige, *American* Hegemony, 9.

easily molded to fit this vision were subjected to acts of violence which performed dominance over nature and people, through razing corn fields or mass killings and mass graves.[31] On the other hand, we can see public declarations claiming an identity based on a harmonious relationship with nature in the controversial book, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*.

Most clearly, the "Middling Maya" and "Development Pushers" which this thesis discusses participated in Krige's vision of co-production of hegemony. These groups both adopted elements of hegemonic power and co-produced their own visions of Guatemalan land alongside them. Both Middling Maya and Development Pushers adapted elements of capitalist ideology and middle-class lifestyle, but also included elements of traditional culture or adapted capitalism in different degrees, as will be explained below. In this way, the ideal-types which are constructed around Guatemalan land allow us to see more nuances within the power structures within Guatemala in the Cold War.

Resistance studies examine how resistance develops and is exercised against hegemonic powers. Jeffrey Gould, writing about resistance to the Somoza rule in Chinandega, Nicaragua, described a "rural consciousness" which developed in the countryside and was expressed in "the only available political language—liberalism— which had originated among urban and rural elites." [32] While Gould argues that resistance stemmed from and incorporated the discourse of the same elite it was resisting, in Guatemala, elites have done the opposite, incorporating and appropriating non-elite environmental discourse. As Edgar Esquit has argued, "the Guatemalan state and governing elites are able to nourish

[31] These rhetorical claims of domination of the Guatemalan landscape worked in two ways: they served to terrorize the immediate population of indigenous peoples, and also created a phenomenon identified by Steven Stern: "Memory Knots," or places where memories linger for those who experience violence, which then shapes the way the violence is remembered beyond the immediate generation.

[32] Jeffrey Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912-1979*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 5.

themselves with Mayanist ideology and discourse to again impose and redefine their own legitimacy at the local as much as the international level."[33] This thesis will show how land was used to legitimize different political projects in Guatemala, by these four different social groups. Importantly, this thesis will also examine "why people in apparently similar "situations of dominations" react differently."[34] In Guatemala during this time period, many social groups were experiencing situations of domination or repression of some sort. This thesis looks at complex reactions to this repression- both those who were being repressed and those who were the repressors.

Constructing Weberian Ideal-Types in Guatemala

The Weberian ideal-type is a method for understanding historical phenomena- "an attempt to analyze historically unique configurations or their individual components by means of genetic concepts."[35] By examining what was the "ideal" conceptualization of nature, land and Guatemala, we can see where the power of the land lies, how it may have changed, and how it fits into more traditional notions of power, such as economic and political. Both the elite and the non-elite in Guatemala constructed Weberian ideal-types of the Guatemalan land resource and these visions competed with each other. Each of these

[33] Edgar Esquit, "Nationalist Contradictions: Pan Mayanism, Representations of the Past, and the Reproduction of Inequalities in Guatemala," In Florencia Mallon, *Decolonizing Native Histories: Collaboration, knowledge, and language in the Americas*. (Durham, Duke University Press: 2012), 206.
[34] John Gledhill, " A Case for Rethinking Resistance," In John Gledhill and Patience Shell, eds. *New Approaches to Resistance in Brazil and Mexico*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2012), 2.
[35] Max Weber, "Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy," *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* trans. Edward Shils, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1949), 93.

visions, centered on a constructed ideal-type, claimed the legitimate control and custodianship of the Guatemalan land as a resource for material and cultural well-being.

For the Ruthless Modernizers, the ideal-type of Guatemalan land utilization was to harness the forces of nature, develop the land, and cultivate the most crops to export for profit- and this concept dated back to independence from colonization through the Cold War. The patriarchal modernizers in Guatemala saw the Guatemalan landscape as an entity to possess and use for profit in this vision. Indeed, the political legitimacy of this vision lay within the profit-making mechanism: the smallholders and Maya people in Guatemala did not have a legitimate claim to land in this vision because they were not working to maximize profit off the land.

A competing ideal-type was constructed, as we shall see below, with the Activist Mayas, as articulated by Rigoberta Menchú Tum. This vision began primarily after the coup in 1954, and gained legitimacy through the 1970s and 1980s, culminating in the 1990s when Menchú was awarded the Nobel Prize. In this vision, Maya people held the legitimate right to control Guatemalan land because they had the benefit of tradition and rituals which allowed them to live in harmony and with respect for the land. This vision was not built around the antithesis to the Modernizers' vision, instead of capitalistic exploitation; the land was a cultural site for preservation of Maya heritage while sustaining Maya life. Maya activists claimed a unique relationship with Guatemalan land as part of their intrinsic identities as Mayan people- this ideal-type emphasized conservation and preservation of the Guatemalan land and Maya people as one pristine unit, intrinsically tied together.

The Development Pushers promoted an ideal-type vision of Guatemalan land which promoted middle class development, new technology and education. For members of these

organizations, it was important to educate indigenous and poor people in Guatemala in order for them to become proper small-holding farmers, using fertilizers, planting new varietals of wheat and other crops which would be more productive than traditional milpas (allowing for sale of surplus) and own their own family plots of land. This vision was promoted through education programs which taught the Spanish language, along with agricultural education programs. The Middling Maya were those social actors in Guatemala who largely adapted the Development Pusher's goals, and retained their own motivations for adapting capitalism and their own methods of cultivating export crops and selling them.

Keeping these ideal-types in mind will help us to understand how the ideal-type shaped reality by inspiring political projects. The visions and conceptions of Guatemalan land that these social groups may have held were not necessarily achieved in reality, nor were the goals of these social groups pursued in manners that were as uncomplicated as ideal-types make them sound. The ways in which these ideal-types differ from reality, offer room for analysis of goals versus actual implementation versus long-term acceptance at different political levels. As an analytical tool, we can examine where land created a power struggle which would not be expected under this model, and therefore improve the sophistication of our understanding of power relations in Guatemala since 1954. The ideal-types constructed visions of Guatemalan land which were not only rhetorical creations, but also had the power to shape the reality of Guatemalan interactions with land. Political visions weren't restricted to the sphere of politics, and we will see that these visions were translated into specific political projects which resulted in specific material consequences for Guatemalans who worked closely with land.

In Guatemalan examples, the flow of power and resistance ran counter to Gould's theory about the development of rural consciousness and resistance through discourse. Gould posits that rural consciousness develops as a result of elite domination, and then adopts the discourse of the local elite. In the case of Guatemala, when looking through the lens of environment, we can see that the government adopted language about nature as a way to project and claim power. Gould contends that "The campesinos' new consciousness was not the result of a sudden, democratic conversion… a class-rooted perception of the social world came about only after years of dealings and confrontations with politicians, businessmen, soldiers, and hacendados."[36] Gould discusses Gerald Sider's conception of the formation of hegemonic power, wherein popular resistance borrows from symbols of elite cultural domination. Again, with Guatemala as a case study, it appears that when the potential hegemon or elite class is deriving power from the natural environment and its mastery over the natural environment (and, by extension, those most intimately connected with that same nature), perhaps because they are equating more "traditional" elements of society with nature, they adopt the language and the symbols of nature that existed before their regime came to power.

Land as both Economic and Symbolic Capital

In Guatemala, in order to understand the way land is integrated into political struggles of the Cold War, it is important to understand that land functioned as both economic and

[36] Gould, *To Lead as Equals,* 6.

symbolic capital. As it is understood in this thesis, land itself is not innately a medium of exchange- it is only in its capacity to produce value that land itself becomes valuable. Land becomes valuable because it holds the ability to cultivate crops, or because it holds some other natural resource (such as lumber), or because the argument can be constructed that the land itself helps to produce civilization. This is not the point of view of all of the four social groups explored in this study, but all the social groups do have to respond to this concept of land value because it has become hegemonic in Guatemala.[37] These values are connected to the corresponding ideal-types created to conceptualize land. This study will show how each of the four social groups conceptualized the value of land in a different way, either as a way to produce economic capital, or what Pierre Bourdieu calls Symbolic Capital. For the Activist Mayas, for whom land's exchange value was not economic, Symbolic Capital became a way to convert the intrinsic, cultural or "naturalized" value of land into an economic or exchange value.

Bourdieu uses the concept of symbolic capital to extend Marxist analysis of capitalism into non-industrialized places. Symbolic capital is according to Bourdieu, "a transformed and thereby *disguised* form of physical "economic" capital,"[38] therefore there is little distinction between the two. Arguing against the dichotomy of social versus economic, Bourdieu argues that symbolic capital is merely a different method of accumulating power. Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as "perhaps *the most valuable form of accumulation* in a society in which the severity of the climate… and the limited technical resources… demand

[37] For a discussion of the transition of indigenous Guatemalans to hegemonic capitalism, see (among others), Roseberry, *Coffee,* 1995.
[38] Pierre Bordieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice: (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 182.

collective labour."[39] For Bourdieu, symbolic capital can include family honor and prestige- for Maya in Guatemala, as this study will show, symbolic capital was constructed within the Maya relationship with Guatemalan land.

Sources

In some ways, there are serious limitations of the sources in this thesis, due to source availability and some disciplinary concerns. Chapter Two uses primarily government documents to tell the story of the Ruthless Modernizers and Development Pushers. A few documents have been selected as representative of the two social groups and examined in great detail. Chapter Three analyzes two main sources in order to discuss the Maya Activist and Middling Maya social groups. This chapter provides an extended discussion of *I, Rigoberta Menchu* and *The Son of Tecun Uman*. Both chapters are limited to sources widely available (i.e. not in specialized archives), and mostly in the English language.

Secondary sources about Maya populations during and following "*La Violencia"* in Guatemala are largely limited anthropological and ethno-histories. These therefore vary widely in their methods employed, and therefore their results.[40] Therefore, I tried to separate my analysis from these studies, instead focusing on the two primary sources, reading them

[39] Bordieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* 179.
[40] See, for example, the difference between Wilkinson's *Silence on the Mountain* and Stoll's *Between Two Armies*. Wilkinson takes the anthropological approach of "listening to the silences" when interviewing Maya people, where Stoll takes a more straightforward angle. Both methods yield new information about how Maya people in the countryside experienced *La Violencia*, but their differing conclusions make them difficult to use.

critically for the relationship that the authors had with Guatemalan land, and their portrayal of the relationships of those around them with Guatemalan land.

Organization

This thesis is organized into two more chapters beyond this introduction, and a conclusion. Chapter 2 discusses the "Ruthless Modernizers" and the "Development Pushers." These two groups are part of the traditionally conceived elite social class and this chapter will demonstrate nuance within this traditional conception of the powerful social groups. Chapter Three discusses the "Activist Maya" and the "Middling Maya" social groups which are part of the traditionally conceived minority social class, and this chapter will demonstrate nuance within the "resistance" category within Guatemala.

Chapter 2

This chapter will show that the traditional dichotomies of power/resistance and elite/non-elite are not nuanced enough to fully understand power dynamics within Guatemala. By looking at how the value of Guatemalan land has been politicized since the 1954 overthrow of Jacobo Árbenz, by different social groups and social actors, this chapter will add nuance through different layers of political power as shown through claims to legitimate use of Guatemalan land.

The two categories proposed by this study, rather than the monolithic "power" block, are the "Ruthless Modernizers" and the "Development Pushers." These two groups show that, while there was a clear elite group that held most of the power in Guatemala, this group was not monolithic or united. While they still default to lumping some Guatemalan experiences together and making generalizations about large groups of people, these categories are meant to show that the traditional "power" groups were more than one and had varying ideas of the goals, aims and purposes of the so-called "elite" agenda in Guatemala.

Control of Nature Through Development – The Ruthless Modernizers

Ruthless Modernizers meant to coax the most economic potential from the land, in the form of development projects and large-scale export agriculture, and saw Guatemalan land primarily in terms of how its export crops competed in world markets. One of the most conspicuous programs was the Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress (*Alianza para*

el progreso). The official Guatemalan government response to the Alianza illustrates the Ruthless Modernizer's ideal type emphasis on large scale agriculture and economic development. At one point, the response asserts that "If the United States of America had bombarded Latin America with atomic bombs, it would not have done as much damage as has been done to us by providing capital and assistance to Africa, Indonesia and others for the planting of coffee."[41] In this way, the GOG hyperbolically links the primary export crop, coffee, to complete economic devastation when the United States assisted other parts of the world in their coffee-growing endeavors. The GOG here rhetorically creates a country-wide dependence on the overall success on the world market of the large Guatemalan coffee *fincas*. This promotes the ideal-type of Guatemalan land use of monocrop agriculture and its accompanying large plantations.

Later in the response to the Alliance for Progress, the GOG argues the need for increased education (a large component of the Alliance for Progress), particularly in the areas of educating experts in science and technology. The response states that Guatemala has neither adults nor children who are "well prepared for modern activities in the exploitation of natural resources."[42] In this sense, "exploitation" has a positive meaning to the Ruthless Modernizers. This component of the Ideal-Type involves a mission to conquer and dominate the land in a rational manner, as a way to achieve material productivity. Furthermore, in the context of wanting more experts through education, the Guatemalan government wants to

[41] "Consideraciones y Respuestas del Gobierno de Guatemala, C.A. al discurso del Excelentisimo senor John F. Kennedy, Presidente de los Estados Unidos de America." Folder: Guatemala: General, 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Digital Archive. Document 2, page 7.
[42] Ibid, page 11.

educate Guatemalan people on the "proper" relationship between Guatemalan citizens and Guatemalan land.

The Modernization Theorists of the 1960s supported these views of the Ruthless Modernizers, as they believed that implementing development projects would improve infrastructure, agriculture and education, and therefore the progression of countries from primitive to modern could be sped up. Becoming truly modern, in the way of the United States, would inherently discourage any further entrenchment of Communist ideals and indeed, would reverse any foothold Communism may have had within these formerly "backward" countries.[43] Many development programs were a way of harnessing the power of the environment, and laying claim to the legitimate use of this power. The classic example is through big dams; however in Guatemala these projects took the form of improving agriculture, infrastructure and education.[44]

Arturo Escobar discusses development in Latin America in his book *Encountering Development*. Escobar describes development as "a historically produced discourse."[45] This discourse promoted ideas of modernization and improvement, but produced effects such as "massive underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression."[46] Escobar identifies these discourses of development as constructing specific thoughts and practices, which produced a way of experiencing and thinking about the Third World in which denizens began to self-identify as 'underdeveloped.' While this analysis certainly

[43] Latham, *Modernization as Ideology.*
[44] For Dams, see Worster, *Rivers of Empire*. For information on Guatemalan development, see USAID reports discussed below FRUS XII, American Republics, Document 16 for education funding.
[45] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 6.
[46] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4.

helps to explain the discourse of development and its effects on Latin Americans, it still reproduces dichotomies- discussing developed/developing, those who create discourses and those who experience them- with less emphasis on possible nuances of experience.

The United States, working along with the Guatemalan government, laid claim to the Guatemalan environment through development and modernization programs. Following the tradition of the Good Neighbor policy of the 1930s, continued through the auspices of the Alliance for Progress in 1961, USAID, the US Military Assistance Program (MAP), Catholic Action and the Peace Corps, the Guatemalan government and the U.S. government worked to improve the 'primitive' Mayas.[47] Examples of these policies include: encouraging chemical use in agriculture, educating Maya populations, encouraging the cultivation of non-traditional export crops such as broccoli and snow peas, and building roads to facilitate transportation to the fincas.

In 1961, the Kennedy Administration's task force for Inter-American Relations determined that educating (also called propaganda in the report) Latin Americans in the ways to carry out democracy and freedom were essential for American security. Further, the report claims that, "The forces sweeping Latin America today demand progress, and a better life for the masses of their people, through evolution if possible, or through revolution if that price must be paid."[48] "Evolution" in this context seems to be a synonym for development. In 1961, the education which would have been important for the Kennedy administration, as illustrated by the Alliance for Progress, was to perpetuate middle class development-

[47] Quoted in Stephen M Streeter. "Nation-Building in the Land of Eternal Counter-Insurgency: Guatemala and the Contradictions of the Alliance for Progress," *Third World Quarterly*. (Vol 27. No. 1: 2006), 59.

[48] Berle to Kennedy, Letter, July 7, 1961, FRUS Volume XII, Document 16. http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v12/d16

including the cultivation of privately owned land for the attainment and maintenance of private and family wealth. The Guatemalan government, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, agreed with this ideal-type and wanted to evolve/develop/exploit Guatemalan land for the most economic profit possible.

Another State Department telegram, sent to the embassy in Guatemala in 1961 stated, "Primary US objective in Latin America and only long-term solution to basic problems of area is to advance as rapidly as possible in social and economic development, thereby giving mass of people greater stake in functioning of their own government."[49] This greater stake was meant to replicate Western governmental values, as the U.S. had already made it clear through the overthrow of Árbenz that a democratic government that included left-leaning elements was unacceptable. Social and economic advancement would have only most attainable for those who already had some expendable capital- those who were already the elite or in the middle class. Those who were not able to (or chose not to) advance socially or economically in this way, through private enterprise and stockpiling of wealth, were not encouraged to participate in the government. Instead, those people were suspected of colluding with guerillas.

These policies strove to push Guatemala into the "modern" end of the traditional to modern spectrum, as conceived by modernization theories. Through education, the population could not only become literate, but schools could also serve as an indoctrination site for preaching anti-communist (and often anti-traditionalist) behaviors. Roads would facilitate commerce in that labor could more easily reach work sites, and any crops grown for

[49] Chester Bowles, "Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Certain Diplomatic Posts in the American Republics" Washington, May 10, 1961. FRUS XII, American Republics, Document 75. Accessed online: http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v12/d75

sale could be transported to markets. Non-traditional export crops (and their corresponding chemical fertilizers and pesticides) would enable the lower classes of Guatemalan peasantry to take part in capitalistic endeavors as they could grow surplus crops for sale.

A National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) from 1964 reveals the CIA's perception of a need to develop Latin American countries, stating "Backwardness is not itself a spur to revolution, but rising consciousness of deprivation is."[50] This National Intelligence Estimate recognized an important link in Latin American countries between a rising expectation change in material living conditions and revolution. At the same time, the outlook for actual material improvements for many Latin American people was not good, which had the potential, in the eyes of the CIA to lead to serious dissatisfaction and uprisings. The nature of these potential uprisings was unknown, whether a populist (Peronist) movement or Communist (a la Castro) movement, or a democratic movement. However, it was noted that because the U.S. was the predominant foreign influence in the region, it was likely that discontent would be directed against the U.S. The report identified that this "ultranational," "anti-Yankee Imperialism" sentiment was precisely what occurred in Guatemala during the Árbenz years and also in Cuba under Castro. The Soviet Union, according to the report, had been, for 40 years, investing serious effort in spreading Communist ideals in Latin America, which was part of the reason for the extreme concern for the potential spread of communism in Latin America.

This NIE therefore linked development and anti-communism efforts as security necessities in Latin America. The CIA recognized in this report that the material living

[50] "National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) 80/90-64- Communist Potentialities in Latin America." Washington, April 19, 1964. FRUS Volume XXXI, South and Central America and Mexico, Document 24. http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d24

conditions experienced in Latin America were insufficient. Rather than focusing on government repression or wages and treatment on fincas, as the USAID reports discussed below will show, the USG and GOG focused simultaneously on development projects and education projects such as the Catholic Action to try to convince poor people that being poor was godly, and not to resist their economic state.

Much of the development efforts in Guatemala were carried out through the auspices of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID focused on several projects. Significantly, these projects were not confined to construction of roads or implementation of agricultural techniques. For example, one memorandum tied roads, irrigation, fertilizers and high yield varieties of wheat with counter insurgency and military intelligence.[51]

The modernizers/developers tied the fate of the Guatemalan land to the fate of Guatemalan Communism in an inverse relationship. Development of the Guatemalan land was one way to combat communism, because developed land would lead to productivity, and a more stable population because they would be properly capitalistic through private property ownership and export agriculture of non-traditional crops. These ideas were accepted by the GOG, the USG and many of their respectively sponsored agencies. Not considered as possible outcomes for this type of development were the detrimental effects of chemical fertilizers to the environment, or the desire of farmers to cultivate non-traditional crops using non-traditional methods.[52]

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[51] Memorandum, March 31, 1969, "Implementation of IRG/COIN Working Group Action Plan for Guatemala. USAID Development Experience Clearing House. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAC307.pdf

[52] For example, Edward Fischer & Peter Benson. *Broccoli and Desire: Global Connections and Maya Struggles in Postwar Guatemala*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Directly related to the environment, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) commissioned and produced reports that examined the productivity of agriculture in Guatemala and surrounding countries with similar agricultural systems, particularly regarding the cultivation of coffee. One particular report for USAID was produced in April of 1964.[53] It noted that Guatemala was one of the least efficiently productive coffee producers in Latin America, due to several factors. These included absentee ownership, reluctance of landowners to reinvest profit into production, insufficient capital, plentiful land and labor de-motivating maximum productivity, insufficient government management, prevalence of primitive production methods and a lack of research. This report is significant because much of the blame for the productivity lag rests on the shoulders of land owners- from absenteeism to capital to reinvestment of profits- but many of the proposed solutions focus on making changes at the ground level, not at the level of the capital owner.

Coffee was and is an important export for Guatemalans, and an important import for the United States, and we can see that both governments have focused studies and diplomatic attention on coffee production. However, because the study fails to examine the working conditions of coffee plantation workers and instead privileges the importance of increasing production over anything else, it is clear that consumption is the priority of this political economy, not production. Again, the environment is directly tied to economics and production, and development of this land is important for increasing economic production. The report does not examine labor or environmental issues, in effect disappearing these concerns while focusing on the end product of coffee destined for America. Nowhere in this

[53] Russell H Brannon, "Coffee: A Background study with primary emphasis in Guatemala." USAID The Land Tenure Center, College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin Madison, April 1964. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf-docs/PNRAA761.pdf

report, or the 1961 response from Guatemala to the Alliance for Progress, is there any mention of the impact of coffee production on workers, or the Guatemalan landscape.

The Ruthless Modernizers, implemented a moral economy of fear to support their political economy of exploitation and extraction. These are members of the Guatemalan military, U.S. Military, Guatemalan government, and planters/landowners which held specific ties to Guatemalan land in their endeavors for extraction and exploitation. To them, the Guatemalan land and environment was something to be controlled, harnessed and manipulated in order to make their own specific ideal-type of Guatemala be realized. This ideal-type vision was one where Guatemalan land was a natural resource to be controlled and exploited just like any other malleable natural resource. When the modernization projects undertaken by the Guatemalan government failed, or were perceived to fail because the strength and persistence of the 'subversives' increased, the government of Guatemala proved quite convincingly that control was the main objective of its relationship with the environment. When scientific or other methods failed to produce the level of control that the government was looking for, the result was destruction. The corn fields and villages of Maya people living in the highlands were razed when the *soldados* felt they could no longer control the villagers. When the CUC occupied the Spanish Embassy, it too was burned down, killing all that were inside.

This vision promotes capitalism through development, and achieving material wealth through the thorough use of all resources available. In this vision, fallow land was wasted land, and even land that was only providing subsistence (as in the milpas which were razed), was unproductive because it was not producing any surplus for exchange. The land was

something to be conquered, through rational and scientific processes in order to produce the most wealth possible.

As far as Ruthless modernizers were concerned, the Green Revolution was developed specifically for them, and Guatemala was a perfect test situation for the technology developed to mass produce a few select crops carefully designed to produce the most profit for those in economic power. These new crops and other technologies such as fertilizers and pesticides were developed in the United States and Mexico (by the Rockefeller Foundation), and implemented the new technologies in the plantations in Guatemala. These technologies increased the yield of crops available to export to the United States, even though they had harmful effects on the Guatemalan landscape and workers in the plantation fields.

This desire to harness and control the environment can be seen in many ways. The desire of Manuel Estrada Cabrera to rhetorically harness the power of the Guatemalan land by declaring that the Santa Ana volcano was not erupting when it clearly was erupting is one example.[54] Cabrera manifested this need to control the environment for the benefit of foreign investors in order to increase the potential to cultivate more land. It can also be seen in more real manner when, in frustration, the Guatemalan government resorted to burning and thus destroying the Guatemalan landscape when the perceived communist threat was too great. When peasant groups occupied the Spanish embassy in 1980, the embassy was bombed by Guatemalan government representatives. In this, because the government felt out of control of the situation and the place itself of the embassy, the last resort was burning- executing a very real claim to legitimacy and authority over the place. Similarly, during the years of the

[54] Wilkins, *Silence on the* Mountain, 66-67. Although this occurred before the time period of this thesis, it stands as a foundational example of elite desire to control the Guatemalan environment through any means possible. When physical control was not possible, they resorted to rhetorical control.

Mayan genocide under Rios-Montt, cornfields were sometimes razed, as depriving Mayan people of their milpas would deprive them not only of their subsistence, but also of their connection to their culture and religion. This need to control land was not, therefore, restricted to rural areas, or the Guatemalan countryside- it included urban spaces as well.

The Guatemalan government, the "ruthless modernizers," resorted to such drastic measures as it perceived that certain sites, such as the Spanish embassy and Mayan cornfields, became sites where resistance and support to government anticommunism policies polarized. Burning was consistent with the authoritarian and repressive nature of the regime, and also with the cultivation of fear that was so central to the maintenance of political legitimacy. These sites became contested spaces where the land itself was politicized not for its productive capability, as these modernizers were wont to do, but for their political potential in producing productive Guatemalans, which would then contribute to the development project through their labor. Land needed to be harnessed and controlled, no matter where it was, or what it was producing.

Guatemalan President Efrain Rios Montt (1982-1983) once said in a speech broadcast in Guatemala: "We face a great injustice- the direct result of underdevelopment." Rios Montt, accused of perpetrating genocide against Maya people in the countryside, here clearly draws a line between modern and primitive, like traditional modernization theorists. Injustice, for this Guatemalan president, was not the violence and repression that Guatemalan soldiers were perpetrating against the Maya people in the Guatemalan countryside- it was the threat that these Maya people posed to Guatemala because their subversion was intricately tied to the fact that they didn't use their land in the same capitalistic way that Rios Montt wanted them to. For Montt, development *was* freedom- and tied to the consolidation of his

power through elimination of unstable elements in his country and increased capital. The ideal type for this military dictator was the freedom or ability to live in a stable, capitalist society in which land was privately owned and cultivated in order for the land owners to accumulate wealth and debt. Communists, who did not subscribe to these ideals, threatened Montt's vision of freedom and stability because their communal property ownership was underdeveloped and therefore less stable. These are all examples of "elite" control over Guatemalan land and environment in attempts to have control over the population. Modernization theorists and the "elite" anticommunist efforts within the Guatemalan and U.S. governments all propounded this control of nature through development.

This vision of elite response depicts a united, repressive force which attempts to control the land and people of Guatemala in order to fight communism. However, there were elements within the "elite" which did not fall neatly into this preconception.

Pushing the Ideal of Development on Guatemalans

The "development pushers" of Guatemala were elements of the traditional elite which differed from the hard-line repression and development-at-all-costs mindset of the "ruthless modernizers." Included in this category were elements of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), liberation theologists and some members of the upper echelons of the U.S. government. These social groups subscribed to the moral economy of modernization and progress, along with the political economy of capitalism, although in a different way than their more exploitative counterparts. Development pushers still advocated

a need to control and dominate the environment, but in order to cultivate new crops to benefit the peasants, not the wealthy landowners. Specifically, development pushers believed in the propagation of the middle-class smallholder in Guatemala through the cultivation of non-traditional export crops. In order to spread this ideal, the Development Pushers relied heavily on education campaigns.

In 1968, the American Ambassador to Guatemala sent a memo to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs which acknowledges a distinction in the minds of the U.S. Government between differing types of actions in Guatemala based upon geographic location. Mein wrote,

> I am puzzled, therefore, by what appears to be a change in Washington thinking. While the campaign was going on in the mountains we gave it our blessing, but once the center of action shifted to the capital we seem to view the matter in a different perspective. We seem to be saying that the campaign in the mountains was "counterinsurgency", and therefore necessary if the democratic institutions were to survive, while the campaign in the city against the same forces is "repressive action", and therefore wrong. I frankly fail to see the difference.[55]

Mein's puzzlement is an indication of two things. Firstly- this shows that the Guatemalan countryside was much more contested than the city space. Secondly- it shows that different factions of the U.S. government had different opinions about which course of action was acceptable. Mein seems to be in favor of large amounts of violence, all across the country. But, he was receiving information which contradicted that view, saying that repressive violence was only appropriate in the countryside. The countryside/mountains is the site of guerilla encounters, and therefore anti-communist encounters. The mountains were the places

[55] Gordon Mein. (U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala) to Covey Oliver (Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Letter. Guatemala City, February 27, 1968. FRUS Volume XXXI, Document 100. http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d100

where large finca owners did not reside or place their fincas- as the coastal areas were much easier to get to and more fertile. The mountains were populated by indigenous peoples, who were not engaged in large scale export agriculture. The combination of mountainous terrain and people who were not overtly capitalist made the mountains a contested site where a higher level of violence was acceptable in order to combat the threat of communism from the guerillas.

Later in 1968, a memorandum of conversation reveals further stratification within the U.S. government. The Guatemalan Defense Minister, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Guatemalan Army and the Guatemala Embassy Attaché met with several U.S. Government officials, including Covey T. Oliver, the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs. In this, Oliver tells the Guatemalan contingent that "informed public opinion in the U.S., including congressional opinion, took the view that there was too much violence from the right in Guatemala,"[56] and the conversation then turned to how to curb this perception. Furthermore, Oliver asked if the Guatemalan government "could not do more to help the campesinos," in order to help remedy the perception problem. While much of this is self-serving and is focused more on the press than actually doing good things for Guatemalan citizens, especially campesinos in the countryside, it still shows that there was not a completely monolithic repressive force committing violence against Guatemalan peasants.

USAID also commissioned a study on the environmental degradation of Guatemala in the early 1980s, before the worst of the violence to Maya communities but almost three decades after the Árbenz coup. This report was presented to study any environmental

[56] "Memorandum of Conversation re: Security Situation, Terror and Counter-Terror in Guatemala." Washington, March 13, 1968. FRUS Volume XXXI, Document 101. http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d101

problems arising in Guatemala, citing where these problems stemmed from and propose solutions. The study, done by a team from the University of Georgia, identified the major problem of large population growth, particularly in regions such as the Western Highlands which were unable to support enough agriculture for subsistence and also in urban areas such as Guatemala City, as the primary reason for much of the environmental degradation in Guatemala. This population growth resulted in deforestation and forest deterioration, leading to soil erosion and depletion, which in turn siltified streams and contaminated them with fertilizers and raw sewage[57].

This report notes that economic development has been a contributor to environmental degradation, and a major barrier to addressing environmental concerns stems from the elite concern for economic gain. Furthermore, the report states that this tendency to ignore environmental concerns "may be partially based on the concept that the natural environment should be conquered and the erroneous belief that renewable natural resources are inexhaustible."[58] In this way, a USG agency, USAID, recognized that nature and conquest are linked in the ideas of the ruling elite. Expanding on this idea, the report explains that:

> Guatemala's basic development objectives are optimal use of the nation's human and physical resources, higher income levels and employment, and improvement of living conditions and levels of living. Such broadly state objectives have little meaning, but one point clearly stands out: the development objectives are economic in nature and call for increased production.[59]

[57] James Cooley et al. "Environmental Profile on Guatemala; Phase II: assessment of environmental problems and short and long term strategies for problem solution." University of Georgia, Institute of Ecology, U.S. Department of State, National Committee for Man and the Biosphere, USAID Bureau for Science and Technology, May 1981. USAID Report Number PN-AAJ-805, 13 http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAAJ805.pdf
[58] Cooley, "Environmental profile on Guatemala," 16.
[59] Cooley, "Environmental profile of Guatemala," 38.

Development projects in Guatemala, according to this report, were not undertaken in an altruistic manner- they were directly tied to economic interests. Furthermore, due to the nature of economic control in Guatemala, the development projects were undertaken to further wealthy Ladino economic interests. This report's treatment of effects on Guatemalan laborers are restricted to brief discussions of the body as a site of environmental degradation- for example, the harmful effects of chemical pesticides are outlined.

However the report states, very little attention had been paid to environmental degradation because the focus of development has been from wealthy Ladinos. The people who are in power appropriate the best land, which was most fertile and least affected by erosion and depletion, dating back to the Spanish conquest. The Indigenous peoples cultivated their land in the remaining Western highlands, and "there the traditional Indian land-conserving practices of irrigation, terraces, and contouring were widely used. Man in that region was truly coupled to the natural environment."[60] Here a representative of the USG itself draws a distinction between the associations and uses of the land of Guatemala between those in power and the Maya. This point is driven home:

> Guatemala is culturally divided. The Ladinos have traditionally been oriented toward short-term economic gain without much regard for the future. This attitude can be traced to the earliest periods of Spanish control. Today, with political instability an everpresent (sic) danger, Ladinos strive to obtain the maximum possible income while they are able to without regard to the future. The Indian culture group is diverse but traditionally has practiced conservation methods. The problem of environmental degradation with the Indian is not so much a problem of attitude or culture but one of a lack of alternatives. However, many Indian practices have been lost by the gradual breakdown of their society.[61]

[60] Cooley, "Environmental profile of Guatemala," 39.
[61] Cooley, "Environmental profile of Guatemala," 45.

This is important because it shows an evaluation of the competing claims to legitimate use of Guatemalan land from a rather unique perspective: a third-party USG source. The ideal-type of Maya custodianship of land is here placed in greater esteem than the capital-centered government claim to dominance. Furthermore, this report suggests that the government claims are not only insufficient, but that as far as the environment is concerned, the government is actually doing more harm than good and these ill-effects are tied to the social-cultural conditions within Guatemala.

This report shows that, in the 1980s, the U.S Government, which was publicly proclaiming support for the violent Guatemalan government, also contained elements which believed the political value of the land was better entrusted to the indigenous population- or the non-elite population in Guatemala. During the violent 1980s in Guatemala, the traditional narrative depicts a unified Guatemalan government and military, propped up by solidarity with the Reagan Administration, pursuing a doggedly anti-communist agenda which resulted in extreme violence against the Maya people of the countryside. But this document shows a struggle within the U.S. government over which group in Guatemala truly had the right to control Guatemalan land.

This USAID document departs from the official line promoted by the U.S. government, which was providing arms and other military aid to the Guatemalan government and its support of large finca owners. In this, it shows a different layer in what would traditionally be thought of as the "elite" response to indigenous movements and indigenous claims to rightful custodianship of the land. Notably, in the quote above, this report acknowledges that not all Indians were engaged in best practices for the Guatemalan landscape- but this report assumes that this is not due to malicious intent, but rather the dire

circumstances and lack of alternatives. In this way, the report asserts that the malicious finca owners and managers, because they have access to technology and knowledge but choose not to use it, were intentionally (and unforgivably) harming the Guatemalan government in their unrelenting search for profit. This was, according to the report, an intentional misuse of technology. The benevolent Indians, on the other hand, may have been also harming the environment through deforestation, for example, but this was due to a lack of knowledge and because they were forced into these circumstances by the malicious finca owners. Traditional knowledge, according to the report, was the source of the best conservation methods for Guatemala.

Published just after the publication of *The Education of Little Tree*, a (later proved to be largely fabricated) memoir of the importance of 'traditional' Cherokee knowledge – and connection to nature, and shortly before the release of *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, in which Captain Kirk and Spock travel back in time to the 1980s United States to save the whales, this report too defaults to the position that traditional knowledge and lore is best. This comes with a picture of the indigenous person living harmoniously and "at one with" nature, and fails to critically examine the practices of native peoples. Therefore, it seems clear that this report is reacting to conditions in the environmental and indigenous peoples' movements within the United States, rather than Guatemala. The deference to the authority of traditional knowledge, then, as a reaction to conditions in the United States, had clear implications for social groups in Guatemala. The next chapter will show a further implication of authority of traditional knowledge with the work of Rigoberta Menchú.

I, Rigoberta Menchú was a way to capitalize upon this trend in American thought and garner support for the Maya movement within the United States, without challenging the

anticommunist agenda of the U.S. government. The book became popular on university campuses, where indigenous studies gained favor. Emphasizing the harmonious and respectful relationship that the Maya have with nature was a way to draw attention to the Maya cause without emphasizing the overt trauma and violence being experienced at the time of publication (1982).

Chapter 3

Just as the previous chapter examined nuance among the traditionally conceived "powerful" social groups in Guatemala, this chapter will explore nuance within the traditionally conceived "resistance" social groups. The politicization of land and complexities of relationships with land can be seen as some social groups claimed a unique relationship with land and traditional knowledge about land as a source of symbolic capital and power, while others adapted the hegemonic ideology to fit their own circumstances.

The "Maya Activists"- Land as an integral part of Maya Identity

The Maya Activist group combines many leftist organizations and social groups together- not because they had converging political agendas, but because they used the idea of a unique relationship with Guatemalan land as a claim to power. In this, these social groups promoted a political vision of Guatemalan land that valued tradition and community over development and profit. These visions emphasized the primacy of Guatemalan land as a resource and point of origin for community solidarity and survival rather than individual profit. Maya activists claimed a unique relationship with the Guatemalan land as a fundamental component to their identity. This relationship was depicted as harmonious, one in which the land was cultivated using traditional methods, and these traditional cultivation methods also served to help preserve the cultural heritage of Maya people. For some guerilla groups, Guatemalan terrain and landscape was an integral part of their resistance strategies, enabling both combative strategies as well as rallying points/identifiers.

Activist Maya are often in support of the Maya movement and the resurgence of Maya costumbre, but more broadly support a return to internal Guatemalan actors in government, away from capitalistic foreign influence. These make up traditionally conceptualized "resistance" movements in Guatemala. Their moral economy is often comprised of a cooperative element- either a resurgence of Maya costumbre or socialism, and the political economy of these groups is often either subsistence or political socialism. These groups profess a polemic reverence for the Guatemalan environment as a crucial component of their identity in order to claim that they have the legitimate authority to be rightful custodians of Guatemalan land. Their traditional rites include a suspiciousness of new technology, including technology from the Green Revolution. Notable members of these groups include Rigoberta Menchú-Tum and guerilla movements such as ORPA.[62]

As ideal types, these groups are not monolithic, and there are certainly important ideological variations. However, broadly conceptualized, these social groups that fall on the far-left end of the spectrum view elements of the Guatemalan landscape as social capital and a source of power for their particular visions of Guatemalan land. These political visions are sometimes best defined by what they oppose: they are anti-capitalist, anti-foreign influence (mostly defined as U.S. corporations), and often anti-Guatemalan government as the Guatemalan government was seen as being violent and repressive. Capitalists for these groups are the large plantations where Maya families are forced to work in very poor

[62] Rigoberta Menchú's work and book have come under close scrutiny with the publication of David Stoll's book. Stoll documents cases where events that Menchú describes in her book either didn't happen as she said they happened (i.e. they didn't happen to her), or didn't happen at all. For example, a brother whose death Menchú describes in great detail in the book, Stoll discovers is still living. A scholarly response to Stoll's criticism comes from John Beverly, who argues that Menchú's book serves as testimonio, which as a genre requires a less strict burden of "fact," but instead relies upon collective experience and emotion. A further discussion of the relevance of this controversy to this thesis follows.

conditions, and wealth is accumulated in the hands of a few Ladinos, for seemingly the sole purpose of accumulating more wealth. Instead, these leftist groups conceptualized their land as being free from outside influence, traditional crops cultivated in a traditional manner (often maize and beans cultivated in milpas), the ability to live in community groups with their families, and to choose whether community or individual property ownership is appropriate. These social groups rely on traditional knowledge as a form of symbolic capital and a method of gaining (or re-gaining, in their eyes) power within the Guatemalan governmental structure.

The Pan-Maya (or just Maya) movement gained legitimacy after the Árbenz coup. Major components of this movement included not just political activism, but also a resurgence and return to traditional Maya religion and rites which included a traditional relationship with nature. These so-called "resistance" groups conceptualized their ideal-types of nature through largely non-violent means, including the return to Maya traditions and the articulation of these traditions and values in an emergent vibrant literary culture. Other components of this movement were an emergence of Maya literature, and an effort to record Maya languages- an emphasis on the written and spoken word to preserve and strengthen Maya identity and culture. A large part of this identity and culture was the sense of place (land), and the centrality of the cultivation of maize. Especially by the late 1980s, after the brutal rule of Rios Montt and the beginnings of the U.S. environmental movement after the Vietnam War, tying Maya identity to the rightful custodianship of the Guatemalan land lent legitimacy to both causes.

Rigoberta Menchú Tum, a Maya activist, was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1992 for her work calling attention to the plight of the Maya in Guatemala. Most notable is her book,

titled (in its English Translation), *I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian Woman in Guatemala*. While the account itself has been controversial, the claims regarding the Mayan identity and relationship to Guatemalan land are significant. Menchú, in the very beginning of her story, claims to tell the "story of all poor Guatemalans.[63]" Menchú tells the story of her family-starting with her poor landless parents applying to the government for some land in the *altiplano*, or central highlands of Guatemala. These highlands have much poorer-quality soil than the volcano-fed, fertile soil of the coast and take 7-8 years to come to full productivity. Eventually a village formed around the Menchú family, but the small milpas (or personal maize plots) did not produce enough for subsistence, and the villagers were forced to also find work elsewhere, primarily in coffee or cotton fincas, or plantations. In this description, Menchú is able to draw a stark contrast between the treatment of land by the Maya and by the fincas. At the same time, the distinction is drawn between the Indians and the Ladinos and the Ladino government. In a way, this in and of itself is a form of ideal-type resistance to the control exerted over the Maya people by the Ladino government.

Menchú's book shows "the historical prevalence of everyday resistance as the basis for popular cultural forms and the raw materials out of which broader social and political movements have sometimes been articulated and developed."[64] The governmental and policy elite encouraged the perpetuation of their hegemonic ideology of capitalism through private property and export agriculture. In this book, the Maya people show quotidian resistance to this ideology simply by retaining traditional Maya practices such as cultivating their *milpas*

[63] Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, trans. Ann Wright, ed. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, (New York: Verso. 1996), 1.

[64] Mark Zimmerman, *Literature and Resistance in Guatemala: Textual Modes and Cultural Politics from El Senor Presidente to Rigoberta Menchú*, Vol. 1., (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies: 1995), 43.

and resisting private property ownership. By the teaching and learning of Maya *costumbre* and rituals, resistance is perpetuated through generations, as is evident in the generational shift from Menchú's parents to Menchú and her siblings. A large part of this *costumbre*, according to the book, is the recognition that all things come from the Earth, which must be loved and protected.

Maya identity, as separate from Ladino and Ladino government identity, in Menchú's book is largely identified by the relationships Maya have with the land and organisms surrounding them.[65] This includes the way that Maya grow maize and other crops, the food that is eaten, the animals which are a part of Maya life, and the corresponding Mayan traditions which characterized daily life. These traditions were disrupted during the regular trips to the fincas- thereby reinforcing the dichotomy between the Indians and the Ladinos. Furthermore, when retreating to the mountain jungles and hiding from soldiers that were raiding their village, Menchú's community was forced to suspend traditions and rites in their hiding places as well. While traditions and rituals were suspended, Menchú makes a clear case for the centrality of the land and the natural environment to Mayan identity, and how that is different from Ladinos. For Mayas, she explains, "Maize is the center of everything for us. It is our culture.[66]" Maize is not a naturalized element of the Maya cosmovision- Maize comes from the land which must be cultivated carefully and respectfully in order for the organism to grow. For Menchú, the Mayan tradition, which included a strong relationship with nature and specific ways of cultivating land, was a source of power and a claim of legitimacy towards that land. Maya are taught to "think of the earth as the mother of man,"[67]

[65] This been termed the "Maya cosmovision"
[66] Menchú, *I, Rigoberta,* 54.
[67] Menchú, *I, Rigoberta,* 57.

which stands in stark contrast to the rapacious nature of the landowners of the finca and the treatment of the finca land and the literal rapacious nature of the *soldados* which encounter the Maya in their quest to root out subversive communists in the villages.

Much of the Maya literature, such as Menchú's, falls into the category of resistance literature, "literature about and sometimes of the subaltern groups, literature against the cultural and political forces dominating Guatemalan society, literature that portrays resistance and literature that itself constitutes resistance and oppositional alternatives.[68]" In fact, it has been argued that "the emergence of testimonio in Guatemala is directly related to the struggle against the nation's successive military dictatorships and their effects." The term *testimonio* refers to this genre of writing, in which groups who might not traditionally hold literary power harness this power and therefore enter the hegemonic system under which they have lived. Testimonio shows the claiming of power by 'subaltern' groups in several possible ways.

For Menchú, testimonio took several forms. In some cases, she explicitly draws comparison between Ladinos and the Ladino government, and the Mayas and the Maya connection with nature. In other cases, the Ladinos are nowhere to be seen in the story: a kind of resistance by omission. But for most of the book, Menchú does not tell a story of resistance. She tells a story of repression, but also a story of a group of people who withstood repression and misery through their costumbre- their connection with Mother Earth. This claim of the power and strength of the Maya people, despite the interference of the Ladino government, and the claim that this power comes directly from a close relationship to the Earth, the Maize crop, and the Mayan traditions shows a different picture of village life in the

[68] Zimmerman, *Literature and Resistance*, 3.

altiplano than one of a group of resistance fighters sustained by rage, or of a rag-tag group of communist subversives, or even of simple-minded peasants.

The 1982 American film, “When the Mountains Tremble,” depicts Menchú’s story, along with much of the political background which Menchú’s original work does not address. This 90 minute explanation of the Guatemalan predicament opens with two separate stories, linking them together: Menchú opens with a discussion of the Maya traditions and respect for Mother Earth and Maize. Then the film cuts to a dramatization of a conversation between Jacobo Árbenz and U.S. ambassador John Peurifoy, in which Árbenz and his wife try to convince the Ambassador of the difficulties the United Fruit Company monopoly was causing for the country, and Peurifoy responds by asserting that Guatemala needs to rid its government of the “reds,” and then perhaps the relationship with the United States would improve.

This film is an example of testimonio and taken to a visual level, and filmed with an English-speaking (American) audience in mind. The film depicts the connection between nature and costumbre for Menchú Tum to a lesser degree than the book it claims to be based on, but still clearly makes the case in the opening scene. Maya, maize, and milpa are intricately tied for Menchú and, by extension “all poor Guatemalans”- who are defined by their relationship with the land and the corn they grow on the land. Because the Mayas were there first, and have more respect for the Earth, they have the legitimate claim to the land. Árbenz had been on the right track to redistribute land to “poor Guatemalans,” but the United States altered that course and set Guatemala further down a path of destruction. The film depicts the Ladino Government’s vision of Guatemalan land as dystopic in its unrelenting quest for exportation leading to exploitation of Guatemalan land and labor. The Mayan

vision, then is utopic- an ancient civilization of people drawing upon centuries of past knowledge to live harmoniously and respectfully with the earth through traditional agricultural practices.

These "Maya Activist" social groups, through the use of testimonio, were able to use land as a form of symbolic capital, as Pierre Bourdieu describes is perhaps the "Most valuable form of accumulation" in certain types of societies.[69] Menchú used her book as "a strategy of accumulating a capital of honor and prestige,"[70] in which, unable to participate in the existing mechanisms by which capital is accrued, this special relationship with land is offered as a kind of honor and as proof of authority over the land. John Beverly, responding to the controversy surrounding Menchú started by David Stoll, recognizes Menchú's book as a form of testimonio, and testimonio itself as an assertion or form of agency on the part of the subaltern.[71] In this way, testimonio such as *I, Rigoberta Menchú* holds no economic or exchange value (to use Marxist terms), but instead allows the subaltern to speak for themselves.[72] *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, as a form of testimonio, helped to incorporate the Maya voice into the broader historic record. The emphasis on the Maya relationship with land therefore is significant because of this context. The land, and the Maya relationship with land, is such a large part of the content of Menchú's message, that it becomes an integral part of the testimonio itself, and of the process of claiming agency for this subaltern group.

[69] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice: (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 179.
[70] Bourdieu, Outline, 179.
[71] John Beverly, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
[72] For a further discussion of the importance of "native histories," see Florencia Mallon, ed. *Decolonizing Native Histories: Collaboration, knowledge, and language in the Americas*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

While readers have often received Menchú's book as a plea for indigenous rights and support for the armed resistance movement, David Stoll's criticism of Menchú also centers on land. Stoll is critical of Menchú's views of the Guatemalan peasantry and the authenticity of her claims within the book. What is critically important, to this thesis, is that Stoll does not contest that land is at the heart of the struggle for people in the Mayan countryside- rather he reaffirms that land is indeed the root of the conflict. However, rather than characterizing the struggle for land from Ladino landholders and government agencies as being the impetus for a united and violent peasant political resistance, Stoll argues that peasants were caught "between two fires." According to Stoll, the army and the guerilla resistance fighters placed peasant villages in the middle of their violent struggle, and the peasants would nominally side with the guerillas in the hopes of solidifying their existing land ownership patterns rather than continuing their struggles against the Ladino and government plans for private property ownership which favored Ladinos.[73]

One major component of use land as symbolic capital is predicated on the cultivation of traditional knowledge as a form of power as well. Menchú's claims of distinctly Mayan methods of cultivation and Maya rites for land relied on the authority of Maya traditional knowledge. Thus, a major component of the Pan-Maya movement includes "building new ways of representing and analyzing Maya history."[74] We can see elements of this is Menchú's testimonio, as a very specific version of Maya history is told, which constructs an image of Maya people which was easily accepted by international audiences. The relative focus on environment and mysticism was easily contrasted with the depiction of violence on

[73] David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2005), 9.
[74] Esquit, *Nationalist* Contradictions, 200.

the part of the Guatemalan Army, thereby catching and retaining an international audience at the end of the Cold War.

This symbolic capital was a method of transforming the Maya emphasis on tradition and community into an exchange value of some sort. This was done through claims about how that Maya identity is tied to a special relationship to the land and a need to return to more traditional Maya ways. The tactics used by the book, including stressing the economic disadvantage of the poor Maya further contributes to the creation of symbolic capital, which "can only be accumulated at the expense of economic capital."[75] The book and the film show an ideal type (and use that ideal type as symbolic capital) of personal relationships with "mother earth," and conservation of land resources through small-holding cultivation by community members, not individuals. This ideal type because politicized through its presentation in *testimonio*.

We can see that this tactic of constructing "symbolic capital" through the book worked, when Menchú was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1992. Through this award, the implicit argument within the book that Maya people are special and different than the Ladinos because of their relationship with land is different was legitimized. In the book, both sides (both the Ladinos and the Maya) use violence. The government forces certainly are depicted as using more violence (in volume and severity) and more arbitrary violence, but when Menchú's village retreats into the mountains, they use weapons and kill *soldados* as well. Thus the argument Menchú makes about the uniqueness of Maya must come from somewhere else. The only place in the book where the Maya are consistently different than the government Ladinos is the way they treat Guatemalan land.

[75] Bourdieu, Outline, 180.

This claim of Maya exceptionalism based on the relationship with land is, therefore, a method of cultivating symbolic capital in Menchú's book. It is, as Bordieu described, a "disguised form of economic capital."[76] The claim in the book was not overtly about money- nowhere does Menchú claim that all the Maya wanted was to be paid more. Instead, the payment was in the land itself. While the Maya did not ask for economic capital in the form of more *quetzales*, they did ask for more land, and the right to cultivate that land in a way that would increase their own social prestige and honor. More land would increase social prestige within Maya communities, and also in the international scene, as the book was published in English and resulted in international recognition through the Nobel Prize.

John Beverley argues that the book is "among other things, an argument for understanding Guatemala itself as a deeply multicultural and multilingual nation, in which Indians like herself… deserve greater cultural and legal autonomy."[77] One of the ways that Menchú does this is through the explanation of how Mayan land practices differ fundamentally from the Ladino land cultivation practices. This is one way in which Menchú uses traditional knowledge as a part of her political project. Stoll criticizes this as a sort of rhetorical device which detracts from the truthfulness of her claims, while Beverley characterizes Menchú as "an active agent of a transformative culture and political project that aspires to become hegemonic in its own right: someone… who assumes the right to tell the story in the way she feels will be most effective".[78] In this way, the fact that Menchú chose to focus so strongly on the Maya relationship with land tells of both its importance to the Maya, and its importance to international audiences as well. Florencia Mallon identifies the strength

[76] Bordieu, Outline, 182
[77] Beverley, *Testimonio,* 87.
[78] Beverley, *Testimonio*, 92.

of Rigoberta Menchú in her "combination of power and marginality".[79] While Mallon refers to Menchú's juxtaposition as female elder, this is also similar to Menchú's claim to Guatemalan land itself. While the land is inherently powerful because of its life-giving capabilities, Menchú asserts in her book, the Ladinos have marginalized it in their quest for private property and the value of growing, selling and exporting foreign crops without paying proper attention to its mystic needs.

The controversy surrounding *I, Rigoberta Menchú* itself is telling of the complexities of power relations (although this is not restricted to Guatemala), and the importance of de-naturalizing the role of land and ecology in Guatemalan history of power. David Stoll criticizes Menchú in his 2008 expanded edition of his book for providing a view of the "perfect indians" in Guatemala in her book and in her subsequent speaking tours, and failing to adequately address the complexities of the Indian population in Guatemala, including never mentioning that "Guatemala has become so crowded that redistributing even plantation land invariably pits peasants against peasants; that their struggle for survival usually kills off wildlife and forest…"[80] Similarly, Greg Grandin criticizes Stoll for "assail[ing] her for speaking at US colleges and offering little but ecological- and indigenous-rights platitudes."[81] This debate illustrates just how much the battle over land for Guatemalan indigenous peoples has been naturalized and simplified, to the point where U.S. historians carry on decades-long debates in publications. This thesis is arguing that the ecological components of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* are one of the main points of the story, and one of the main ways in which Menchú claims a unique and legitimate Maya identity. According to

[79] Florencia Mallon, ed. "Introduction," *When A Flower is Reborn*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 12.
[80] Stoll, *Rigoberta,* 299.
[81] Greg Grandin, *Who is Rigoberta Menchú?* (London: Verso Press, 2011), 11 (in note).

Menchú, the Maya relationship with land is valuable in its own right, for its ability to sustain Maya culture.

Middling Maya – Co-producing Capitalism

At the same time that Rigoberta Menchú and others were claiming an innate Maya identity uniquely tied to a harmonious relationship with the land, other Maya farmers chose to adapt Green Revolution technology to their own agricultural practices- either within their own milpas, or to cultivate Non-Traditional export crops such as broccoli, snow peas and strawberries in their desire for "*algo más.*"

The final social category this study will discuss is termed the "Middling Mayas." These are poor, likely ethnically Maya people who might have learned Spanish through education or time in the military and were still very poor, but were able to capitalize on their skills and adopt some components of capitalism into their lives in order to achieve *algo más*, or something more.[82] These groups tend to naturalize the environment much in the same way that the Ruthless Modernizers do, as they tend small plots of tomatoes or snow peas or broccoli to sell at a market, unless there is a natural disaster- then "superstition" is reintroduced and the role of the land is viewed more critically. These people often used technology in small amounts and used the land to adopt the dominant ideology of capitalism to their own purposes. Interestingly, growing cash crops it was sometimes seen as losing some of their "Maya" identity, but strengthening family ties as families were able to stay together more. This view of a segment of the Maya population is different than the

[82] Fischer & Benson. *Broccoli and Desire,* Part 1.

traditionally conceived concept of Maya resistance. This, then, is a different reaction to the same "situation of domination."

Eventually, through organizations such as USAID and the Catholic Action, the promise of success from Green Revolution technology was also pressed upon the smallholders in the highlands. Mostly, this took the form of synthetic fertilizers, which although were received in many different ways by different farmers, did initially reduce the need for the coastal labor migration. However, as time went on, dependence on chemical fertilizers developed- and for those who were subsistence farmers, the need to labor for money on the coast arose again as the small plots of landed required more and more fertilizer that cost more and more money. Some farmers, especially those growing crops which could be exported, were able to pay for their own fertilizer and this also developed into a societal stratification as some farmers still needed to travel to work in addition to growing crops on their own land, and others which had more capital, did not. Those farmers continue to farm non-traditional export crops in their attempts to gain 'algo más' in their lives, and improve their lives in some way. This mixed reaction is a further example of layers of politicized values of land.

Middling Maya produced a vision of Guatemalan land that was both naturalized and respected. People who fit into this category owned smaller lots of land and cultivated export crops such as snow peas and broccoli that they did not eat. Still working on smaller plots of land than the Ruthless Modernizers (who likely did not work the land themselves), Middling Maya experienced a stronger connection to their land, but also viewed land as a tool to gain some wealth. Their political vision of Guatemalan land promoted a middle class society, in

which family groups owned and cultivated their own plots of land for both their own subsistence and for export and surplus as well.

A view of the "Middling Maya" comes from Bonifacio Ignacio Bizarro, who, along with Anthropologist James D. Sexton, recorded his experiences as an Indian in a small agrarian Guatemalan town in the autobiographical account, *Son of Tecun Uman*.[83] Although the name of the book invokes and claims an Indian identity, much of Bizarro's account would look more like the story of a poor Ladino in Guatemala. Rigoberta Menchú, along with scholars of Guatemala, asserts that the biggest distinction in Guatemala is the one between Ladino and Indians. Bizarro tells a story of conscious choices and activities, which claim more of a Ladino identity than an Indian one, while he (or perhaps Sexton) links Bizarro to the great Maya warrior Tecun Uman, who fought and died resisting the Spanish conquest. Bizarro is a leader in his local community, just as Menchú Tum's father was an elder in their village.

Sexton asks Bizarro about traditional practices, or *costumbre*, in his village in order to determine how the village is retaining its traditional ways. Sexton's agenda of promoting Maya traditionalism and preserving Maya culture is evident in his other books and articles, which include compendiums of Maya folktales. Bizarro responds that he has heard about *costumbre* being practiced, particularly in relation to fishing in the lake. But he has not seen it, and because he only fishes for what he and his family eat, he does not need to participate. He also mentions that these *costumbre* are performed secretly, so the villagers do not "gossip" about the people who are taking part.[84] When the earthquake of 1976 devastated

[83] James D Sexton. *Son of Tecun Uman: A Maya Indian Tells His Life Story*. 2nd ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).
[84] Sexton, *Tecun Uman,* 114.

Guatemala, Bizarro discusses the concerns and reactions of his family and his village: their crops are forgotten until the middle of the day following the earthquake, and they immediately thank God for saving the crops and commence irrigation of their "onions, tomatoes, and other vegetables."[85] A few days later, attempting to sell their onions in the central market in Guatemala City, Bizarro and companions get into a conversation with a man claiming to be a shaman and blaming the earthquake on the impiety of the Maya people, and in particular the Protestants. Bizarro doubts this claim, as he is not sure that the towns which had been most seriously affected were predominantly Protestant, and were certainly not exclusively Protestant.[86]

These examples show the problematic nature of Sexton's use of Bizarro as an example of traditional Maya culture, or the revitalization of the Maya movement. Bizarro chose to join the Guatemalan army, where he was educated and learned to read and write the Spanish language. Not only that, but he was exposed to a different culture within the military and reflected on his experience in this way: "I realized that my life-style had changed after my military experience… After the army I now had more self-respect and a little more culture- I was not the same as I was before I had joined."[87] Bizarro thus has chosen to, in some ways, relinquish some of that Maya culture that Menchú so fervently claims as Indian- by volunteering for some formal education and training. Menchú claims that Indians should avoid Ladino schools in order to avoid the indoctrination which comes with formal literacy.

Bizarro is also atypical in that he does not work in the capacity which so many Indians are assumed to- in that he does not work as a day laborer on a finca for most of his

[85] Sexton, *Tecun Uman,* 139.
[86] Sexton, *Tecun Uman,* 151.
[87] Sexton, *Tecun Uman,* 46.

stories. For most of the book, he is a contractor, rounding up other Indians to work on the plantations. In this capacity, he has power over his fellow Maya, and consorts closely with Ladino counterparts- talking with them and eating with them regularly as he visits different towns to sell his own vegetables in markets and the labor of others to plantations. One time, on taking a labor crew to the coast, Bizarro is the victim of an attempted mugging, because of his status as a contractor, and acknowledges that life on the coast is a "delicate situation", but does not elaborate why or explain who the "bad people" who cause this situation are, or how it is that these people are in one situation while he is in another. Are they not all, as Menchú and others would have us believe, Indian?

Bizarro also cultivates his own plot of land, in order to sell for profit. His account of cultivation is very different from the vision of cultivation portrayed by Menchú Tum, who repeatedly emphasizes *costumbre* and tradition and respect for the land. Bizarro's land appears in his story much the same as land appears to foreign modernizers- as a tool for profit- cultivation, not a spiritual center. Bizarro talks about purchasing seed and fertilizer, and fumigating with Antracol- which are both non-traditional agricultural methods for Maya people, and are characteristic Green Revolution technologies.

Middling Maya's ideal-type of Guatemalan land is one that can be controlled enough to provide a little profit for his family. In order to achieve this ideal type, they utilize non-traditional technologies and methods of cultivation, with mixed results. Edward Fischer describes individual families' attempts to adapt to capitalism, and their motivations for doing so in his book, *Broccoli and Desire*.[88] Fischer argues that, as Bizarro's diary shows as well, some Maya families desired more than a subsistence lifestyle, and were less interested in

[88] Fischer & Benson. *Broccoli and Desire.*

Maya costumbre than in having the ability to send their children to school. Export agriculture offered these families a chance to stay together instead of being farmed out to different *fincas* for labor, and also offered the chance to accumulate some savings to put back into their houses, or their children's education. However, these goals were not always met, as export crops needed land, expensive technology (such as fertilizers and seeds), and could not always be sold for the desired profit. Without a quick sale, these small farmers were left with a useless product, as their families did not eat produce such as broccoli or snow peas. This fact was supported by a study by the International Food Policy Research Institute, which determined that growing export crops may have resulted in a slight economic savings, but did not result in better nutrition for children.[89]

The juxtaposition of Bizarro and Menchú show us that the dichotomies which have been traditionally constructed which describe an Indian community which is uniformly repressed, and backward on the modernization scale, is a false dichotomy. Just as there are different visions among the elite/governmental forces within Guatemala, there are different responses among the non-elite populations. This is especially evident when we look at the political appropriations of land values. Menchú Tum and Maya activists claim a moral high ground in the midst of the earth-conscious movement in other parts of the world by claiming the right to proper and moral custodianship of the Guatemalan land as an integral part of Mayan identity. Middling Maya adapted dominant ideology in order to retain important aspects of their culture such as family, but at the same time were able to use this adaptation

[89] Von Braun, Joachim, David Hotchkiss & Maarten Immink. "Nontraditional Export Crops in Guatemala: Effects on Production, Income, and Nutrition. Research Report 7," (International Food Policy Research Institute in Collaboration with the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama, 1989).

to reject other critical elements of the dominant ideology such as including non-traditional crops in the diet.

Conclusion

What we normally think of as a strongly asymmetrical conflict between the Guatemalan government (as supported by the United States government) and guerilla resistance fighters, can be seen in a different light when considering the role of the environment, and the fulfillment of the construction of environmental ideal-types by each party. The modernizers in Guatemala felt that the best course of action was to invest in and implement a development program to "improve" the country's agriculture, infrastructure and education. In this view, Guatemalan land was a force of nature to be dominated, harnessed, and controlled in order to fulfill the full economic potential of the Guatemalan landscape. On the other hand, the Maya movement presented an ideal-type of nature that focused on legitimate custodianship and respect for the land, based upon centuries of agricultural knowledge. This view gained legitimacy in the international community as Rigoberta Menchú Tum was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1992. As Menchú Tum gained recognition and legitimacy for the Maya people, the land of Guatemala also gained value. Not in economic potential, as it had when the discourse was dominated by the Developer's visions, but valued for its ability to reproduce and maintain humanity, beauty, and culture despite considerable odds.

However, we have seen that this simple dichotomy does not provide the whole story. When we step back and examine the different values of Guatemalan land rather than naturalizing the role of nature in the political history of Guatemala, we see smaller struggles and claims to power which are unexplained by the traditional narrative.

The next step in a study such as this would be applying these ideas, of exploring nuance in power relations during the Cold War as seen through environment and resources, to a transnational context. If including the role of land into the study of experiences and power struggles in the Cold War in Guatemala illuminates nuances and layers in power relationships in Guatemala, could similar struggles be shown elsewhere in the "Third World" during the Cold War? Would experiences in the Middle East, for example, be similar to those in Latin America, or different?

An intriguing case for a comparative study would be Iran. The coup in Guatemala was directly inspired by a coup the year previously in Iran. The Iranian coup in 1953 was also spurred by resource nationalization- as Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeqh nationalized the country's oil fields. Both coups were undertaken because the leaders instituted programs nationalizing a natural resource- land in Guatemala and oil in Iran- which constituted a real communist threat for the U.S. government. These were top down reforms, but were justified in the name of "the people" and returning natural resources and the revenue from natural resources back to "the people." This was both a communist- inspired redistribution of wealth and a direct to Western business interests, who were directly threatened by these actions and who directly lobbied for the coups.

Results in Iran and Guatemala (before 1979) were remarkably similar. The Iranian coup instituted a new era in Iranian-U.S. relations, characterized by a new level of closeness and aid, along with extreme repression and violence. Both countries developed military-trained forces with a reputation for being especially brutal and sadistic, in Iran it was the SAVAK police force and in Guatemala it was the special forces known as the Kaibiles. The histories diverged in late 1970s, as Guatemala accepted more military aid from the United

States and embarked on an unusually violent streak targeting largely indigenous groups. Iran, on the other hand, experienced a religiously-based revolution, on an anti-U.S. platform, which also became repressive. Both countries had major opposition groups whose logo was a symbol from the natural world- the Iranian Mujahideen and the Guatemalan ORPA peasant group. These structural similarities make the comparison worthwhile, while the differences would make the study valuable. As pointed out above, resistance studies have begun to study "why people in apparently similar "situations of dominations" react differently"[90] is important. Iran and Guatemala show similar situations of dominations, in the 1950s-1960s, yet the nation-states followed vastly different trajectories. Their different reactions can help to understand the way power and resistance worked in the Cold War in a much more complex and nuanced manner than studying one country alone can yield.

There were many differences between Iran and Guatemala which could illuminate Cold War power dynamics in a way that looking at just one country cannot. For example- in Guatemala, the Maya movement and Rigoberta Menchú provide a tidy example of the power that land can have when utilized as symbolic capital, but there is no indigenous movement of a similar standing in Iran. The Iranian Revolution was ostensibly centered on religion, but is there a component of environment and place involved as well, if so, how does this compare with the movements centering on land in Guatemala? In Guatemala, several sites of land became contested political space and the result is the total destruction of these cities. Did a similar phenomenon happen in Iran, or was there a different explanation for violence and repression? Most importantly, working the land back into the narrative of Iran from 1953-

[90] Gledhill, *Resistance,* 2.

1990 could help to contextualize Shi'i Islam in a way that shifts the focus away from political Islam and onto the experiences of people in Iran.

Development programs were a large focus for the United States and the modernizing conservative governments (at least until 1979 in Iran). In Guatemala, along with the rest of Latin America, the Kennedy administration sponsored the Alliance for Progress, and in Iran the United States supported the Shah's White Revolution, which was a similar program supporting innovation and middle class development. A component of both of these programs was an emphasis on the promotion of Green Revolution technologies of new varietals of wheat, farming implements and chemical fertilizers. For both of these programs, the emphasis was on teaching agrarian peasants to "transition to capitalism." This was undertaken because of concern for the level of infiltration of communism into both countries- both were considered very important for U.S. geopolitical security.

States promoted their vision of mastery over the environment in several ways. In Iran, the shah promoted his version of modernity and development in his White Revolution. The White Revolution, begun in 1963, was promoted by the shah as a modernization program, "with the best and the most up-to-date scientific, technological and social advances of the world."[91] One of the major components included a land reform program in which the shah promoted a redistribution of land to peasants from the large estates, because of the "deep respect agriculture" which had "constituted one of the pillars of Iranian civilization… throughout antiquity."[92] The United States Government, along with the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) helped to promote modernization by attempting to improve the tools and implements used for farming in Iran. While the discourse surrounding the White

[91] Mohammad Reza Pahlavi Aryamehr Shahanshah of Iran. *The White Revolution*. (Kayhan Press),19.
[92] Mohammad Reza Shah, *White Revolution,* 26.

Revolution was triumphant and centered on development and modernization as progress, the actual effects of the reforms were not as clear cut. Land reform, in its actual implementation, was "essentially a conservative program" which did little to actually redistribute land to peasant farmers.[93] The transition from subsistence farming to cash-cropping was rough and led to "despair" among farmers that they would ever be able to adequately feed their families.[94]

On the other hand, resistance groups in Iran, such as the Mojahedin, re-appropriated the message of nature as a symbol of their own power. The official emblem of the Mojahedin, which continues to exist as a group to this day, includes a prominent sprig of leaves, "symbolizing the desire for eventual universal peace."[95] While the Iranian state was promoting an ideal-type vision of peoples' relationship with nature that included domination, mastery and change through technology, resistance groups clung to their alternative vision which promoted a relationship with nature that was grounded in tradition and a more hands-on relationship with nature. In this case, the power resides in the existing discourse, language and symbols that already existed about the environment, nature, and how social groups interacted with nature.

This emphasis is on farming and capitalist development striking, particularly because both countries were traditionally agrarian, so these ideas were in effect altering a major component of peasant life. Like in Guatemala, the historiographical trend for Iran has been on Cold-War dichotomies, and on the rise of Shi'i fundamentalism leading to the revolution in 1979. There is little focus on the impact of the oil industry on the Iranian landscape (both

[93] Eric Hoogland, *Land and Revolution in Iran, 1900-1980*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 100.
[94] Hoogland, *Land and Revolution,* 121.
[95] Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, (New Haven, Yale University Press. 1989), 103.

environmental and social landscape), or on the effects on rural social groups of these development programs. Like in Guatemala, there has been little study of nuanced or layered reactions to development programs. Because these programs were so similar, and because the coups were such a profound turning point (or at least, have been remembered that way in public memory), a comparison of the environmental effects- both on the environment, and on the peoples' relationships with their surrounding environment, can help us to understand the long-term implications of the coups, and post-coup power dynamics within these countries.

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